



Communications and Engagement Plan

Special Variation (SV) application

Background

Council resolved at its Extraordinary Meeting of 28 September 2021 the following:

Moved: Rik Hart

241/21 Resolved

- 1. That Council endorse the making of an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to maintain the Special Variation (SV) increase that was implemented in the 2021/2022 year for another 7 years.*
- 2. That the funds raised from this Special Variation are to continue to fund the financial commitments that enabled Council's financial sustainability.*
- 3. That Council notify IPART accordingly.*
- 4. That Council staff update the integrated planning and reporting documents with information relevant to the proposed SV application.*
- 5. That Council staff undertake community consultation in relation to service levels to inform the proposed SV.*
- 6. That Council undertake recruitment of a representative sample, of randomly selected rate payers, to participate in a Community Reference Group in relation to the proposed SV application to commence by late October 2021.*
- 7. That a budget of \$150,000 be set aside from general ledger 10.11202.870030.000.00000 to fund the community engagement program.*

Community consultation is an important part of the SV process. Effective community consultation enables members of the public to have adequate opportunities to consider the proposed SV, provide feedback to the Council, and for the Council to then consider this feedback. IPART will assess the Council's community consultation as part of our assessment of the Council's application against the criteria set out in the Office of Local Government's *Guidelines for the preparation of an application for a special variation to general income*.

IPART will also accept and consider comments directly from ratepayers and interested parties as part of the SV assessment process.

There is already community awareness of Council's intent to consider a further IPART application in 2022 as Administrator Mr Rik Hart had started raising preliminary awareness about this with the community in media interviews and communications shortly following IPART's determination in May 2021. This was consistently informed to the community as part of Council's ongoing updates about the financial recovery actions and messaging about the focus of recovery being the long term financial and service sustainability of the Council. There is no doubt however, that many in the Central Coast community still have anger towards Council about the financial situation and this context has to be considered in the engagement strategy.



Communications and Engagement Plan

Communications and Engagement Overview

Communication Officer	Teresa Walters																	
Engagement Officer	Teresa Walters																	
Communication and engagement objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform ratepayers of the application to IPART of the SV and scenarios • Inform ratepayers of impacts, need and purpose of SV • Inform specific stakeholder groups impacted on service level changes for each scenario • Engage with residents and ratepayers on service levels • Engage with residents and ratepayers on the proposal • Engage with residents and ratepayers on IP&R documents with scenarios • Advise IPART process for feedback • Keep the community updated on IPART application and financial recovery • Update the community of Council action in financial recovery (ie not just seeking a rate rise) 																	
Communication target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Coast Council ratepayers • Broader Central Coast community, including community groups, sporting and other associations and specific impacted stakeholders. 																	
Issues management / reputation risk assessment	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Issue</th> <th>Rating</th> <th>Mitigation</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Ratepayers should not pay for Council mismanagement</td> <td>High</td> <td>FAQs - Detail actions in Business Recovery Plan Public Inquiry – keep community informed of the Office of Local Government timeline and links to OLG website information</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low socio-economic population – capacity to pay</td> <td>High</td> <td>FAQs - Detail Council’s Hardship Program</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Threat to withhold rates</td> <td>High</td> <td>FAQs – detail compulsory nature of rates and what they are used for</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lack of consultation</td> <td>High</td> <td>FAQs – feedback will be included in submission – also will be an independent IPART process where ratepayers can have their say</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Issue	Rating	Mitigation	Ratepayers should not pay for Council mismanagement	High	FAQs - Detail actions in Business Recovery Plan Public Inquiry – keep community informed of the Office of Local Government timeline and links to OLG website information	Low socio-economic population – capacity to pay	High	FAQs - Detail Council’s Hardship Program	Threat to withhold rates	High	FAQs – detail compulsory nature of rates and what they are used for	Lack of consultation	High	FAQs – feedback will be included in submission – also will be an independent IPART process where ratepayers can have their say
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Communications and Engagement Plan

<p>Key communication messages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council has progressed the Plan for financial recovery and sustainability that includes productivity improvements, selling assets, securing loans, reducing our workforce, revenue streams and a rate rise • Significant productivity improvements have also been made through better management of staff time, technological improvements that have transitioned manual processes into digital ones, and better equipment to help staff do their jobs effectively and efficiently • Council is proposing to apply for a Special Variation to maintain the current ordinary rate for an additional seven (7) years, or ten years in total through to June 2031 • To generate the necessary annual surplus required to meet the annual principal repayments of the \$150 million in Emergency Loans obtained to resolve the financial crisis. • To secure Council's financial sustainability by maintaining the current level of services and to fund the ongoing maintenance of assets by addressing any deterioration of Council's existing asset base. • To continue to embed productivity improvements across the organisation, which are necessary in order to continue meeting increased internal and external expectations within a heavily restructured organisation. • To deliver key priorities as they get adopted in the future Community Strategic Plans and Delivery Programs. • Outline the scenarios and impacts to both rates and services that are considered in the draft LTFP • Promote the opportunities for community to have their say on the proposal • Outline the potential consequence of not maintaining rates in terms of council having to reassess the levels, standard and range of services it provides. This may result in some services ceasing or reducing. It could also see the condition of the Central Coast's assets deteriorate as there would be an ever increasing gap in the funds required to maintain our existing infrastructure assets.
<p>Engagement purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To seek a statistically representative community survey sample on the proposed SV options and understand level of investment for service levels to inform Council's submission to IPART • Seek community feedback on the proposed SV scenarios and CSP update, Delivery Program and Resourcing Strategy to inform Council's submission to IPART • Engage with Community Representative Group to provide advice and guidance on our strategy to ensure the contribution of the voice and vision of the community • Engage with impacted stakeholders on service impacts of the different scenarios.

Communications and Engagement Plan

<p>Summary of Engagement Approach</p>	<p>The phased approach to the consultation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 – Community awareness and information. This includes issuing newsletters, media releases, setting up a dedicated web page, meeting with business and industry leader and community group members to detail the proposal and consultation process • Phase 2 – Consultation. This includes a representative community telephone and online survey to explore usage and satisfaction in services and whether future investment should be more/same/less; and identification of services that could be reduced, if they needed to be. • Phase 3 – Public Exhibition. This includes consultation on the proposed financial scenarios and impacts on services and programs to Council’s Delivery Program and Operational Plan. Following draft documents will be placed on public exhibition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draft Revised Community Strategic Plan, Draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan, Draft Fees and Charges, Draft Long Term Financial Plan, Draft Workforce Management Strategy, and Draft Revised Asset Management Strategy. ○ Report to Council on results of consultation and public exhibition and communicate proposal for consideration. • Submission and IPART Process – Provide information to community and stakeholders on Council’s submission and how to have your say. • Report back to Community on IPART determination – Mid May 2022
<p>Call to action / links</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your say via our online survey • Provide a submission about the IP&R documents • Stay informed about Council’s financial recovery actions via the News page on Council’s website • For more information go to yourvoiceourcoast.com page
<p>Media spokespeople</p>	<p><i>The official spokesperson is the Administrator. If the Administrator is unavailable these people are approved as spokespeople for this campaign</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary spokesperson: Rik Hart, Administrator • Secondary spokespersons: David Farmer CEO and Natalia Cowley, Director Corporate Affairs & Chief Financial Officer
<p>Budget for communications</p>	<p>\$5,000</p> <p><i>Note: Most communications included in existing planned communications and additional budget not required.</i></p>



Communications and Engagement Plan

<p>Communication Approvals required</p> <p>These people need to review and approve communications</p>	<p>This plan (including key communication messaging) before any Communication activity is undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sue Ledingham, Unit Manager Comms, Marketing & Customer Engagement• Natalia Cowley, Director Corporate Affairs and Chief Financial Officer <p>Media releases / media statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teresa Walters• Sue Ledingham• Natalia Cowley• CEO David Farmer• Administrator Rik Hart <p>Other communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vivienne Louie, Sharon McLaren, Melissa McCulloch (as required)
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Communications and Engagement Plan

Timeline

Timeline is from 29 September 2021 and completing by 28 January 2022 for main tasks. Includes timeline for IPART Submission.

Program Week	Dates	Actions
Weeks 1-4	5 Oct – 29 Oct	Establish Community Reference Group Engage Research Consultant Prepare awareness material and begin distribution IPART Meeting Community Reference Group – Meeting 1 Business Leaders Forum – 27 October
Weeks 6-8	1 Nov – 12 Nov	Undertake Phase 1
Week 8		Review
Weeks 9-10	15 Nov – 29 Nov	Undertake Phase 2 Telephone survey – November 2021 Recontact survey – November 2021
Week 10		Online Opt-In Survey – 22 November to 13 December 2021
Weeks 11-12	30 Nov – 10 Dec	Commence evaluation Opt In survey still underway
Week 12	8 Dec	Community Reference Group – Meeting 2
Weeks 12-13	13 Dec – 24 Dec	Collate and evaluate survey results Prepare IP& R documents and Scenarios Council Meeting – Extra Ordinary 20 December 2021
Weeks 14-18	27 Dec – 21 Jan	Undertake Phase 3 Public Exhibition – 22 December 2021 to 21 January 2022
Weeks 19 - 20	24 Jan – 4 Feb	Prepare IPART submission based on community feedback
Week 21	7 Feb	IPART submission
Week 22	14 Feb	IPART consultation
	Mid May 2022	IPART determination

Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation	Measure
Limited community reach due to timeline by IPART	Utilise mass communication print and online tools including printed newsletters, advertorials, e-newsletters, social media, information videos, fact sheets, website content on online engagement platform, media coverage,	Distribution rates Opening rates Subscriber reach Website and page views Downloads Social media reach Media enquiries Newspaper and newsletter reach
Require increased advertising spend (would need to advertise everything as organic reach would not suffice) and would result in poorer response	Cost effective social media boost and leverage through EDMs and other networks. Develop low cost media assets to support the engagement	ROI for social media boost
Extensive internal staff resources specifically allocated to the project to enable community feedback through various touch points	Establish Project Team and consider alternates to address day to day work requirements at peak periods.	Timeline met
Will require external resources to manage project due to current resourcing impacts	Establish internal resources with expertise and seek funding allocation for external research skills and other expertise	Budget allocation
Council would be challenges in some components of IPART requirements to demonstrate all actions from previous determination	Extensive work to be undertaken on Service Level Catalogue and engagement with residents on service levels through surveys Extensive work on productivity improvement and recovery plan to demonstrate Council commitment and change achieved	Level of response to service level questions
COVID will impact some engagement activities in terms of variety and shorter timeframe will limit activities	Consider online opportunities Direct mail to ratepayers – Q2 rates notice and Q3 rates notice	Respondents to surveys Attendance at meetings Attendance at forum Response and attendance to Administrator meetings

NEXT PAGE.... communications deliverables and schedule



Communications and Engagement Plan

Communication and Engagement Deliverables

CHANNEL / ACTIVITY	Notes	Target Audience	LIVE DATE	Responsibility
Brief customer service	Contact Council's Knowledge Management	Internal	N/A	Project Team
Council Meeting Highlight media releases	Council resolution to notify IPART formally of its intent to apply for an SV and inform consultation commencing shortly. Online Community Survey open. Notification of Extraordinary Council Meeting. Council resolution to adopt IP&R documents for public exhibition. Final days to have say on IP&R and LTFP. Council to submit SV application to IPART, inclusive of IP&R and LTFP (tbc). IPART outcomes (tbc)	Media and ratepayers	28 September 2021 22 November 2021 13 December 2021 20 December 2021 20 January 2022 3 February 2022 (tbc) May 2022 (tbc)	Communications
Media interviews	As required, noting include as topic in Administrator fortnightly x 5 regular local media interviews following Council Meetings	Media and ratepayers	Min. fortnightly from end September 2021	Communications & Office of Administrator
News page – Council's financial situation	Ongoing updates about actions towards financial recovery	Ratepayers and community	From 28 September 2021	Communications
Your Voice Our Coast webpage – Maintaining Services and Rates	Main web page - background, timeline, FAQs, supporting information documents, links to information videos, link to online survey, link to submission form for IP&R Public Exhibition and final consultation summary . Main web page link to 3 associated pages for IP&R Public Exhibition. Main web page link to 4 other information pages – Feb 2021 IPART submission & community consultation report; rates harmonisation explained; financial recovery plan; and Water and Sewer pricing consultation and IPART submission 2021.	Ratepayers	From 28 September 2021	Communications & Engagement



Communications and Engagement Plan

CHANNEL / ACTIVITY	Notes	Target Audience	LIVE DATE	Responsibility
Enews articles in Coast Connect weekly enewsletter	Informing about stages of proposal & consultation Promoting online survey open Informing about financial recovery actions	Ratepayer, community & key stakeholder groups	29 September 2021 3,24 November 2021 1, 8, 15, 22 December 2021 16 January 2022	Communications
Stakeholder EDM to community and sporting associations	Informing about proposal Seeking stakeholder support to forward information to their members Call to action: Your voice our coast for more information	Key community and sporting group stakeholders	25 November 2021	Communications
Article in Coast Connect printed advertorial published fortnightly in Coast Community News x 3 newspapers	Informing about stages of proposal & consultation Promoting online survey open Informing about financial recovery actions	Ratepayers and community		Communications
Advertising – print	Promote public exhibition period for IP&R	Ratepayers and community	24 December 2021 13 January 2022 20 January 2022	Communications
Social media: Facebook organic & paid campaign Twitter <i>(schedule min. fortnightly Hubspot)</i>	Informing about stages of proposal & consultation Promoting online survey open and supported by online video (paid campaign) Promoting submissions open for IP&R public exhibition	Ratepayers and community, media & key stakeholder groups	From 29 September 2021 to 20 January 2022 Paid campaign from 25 November 2021	Communications
Rates newsletter – DL x 6 pages Rates newsletter – DL x 2 pages	Q2 rates notice and Coast Connect Quarterly printed newsletter: focus on what, when, why, how and call to action. Q3 rates notice and Coast Connect Quarterly printed newsletter: focus on status and how to keep up to date <i>(note timing of delivery to ratepayers is pre-IPART submission deadline)</i>	Ratepayers	Delivered from 5 October 2021 Delivered from 2 February 2022	Communications



Communications and Engagement Plan

CHANNEL / ACTIVITY	Notes	Target Audience	LIVE DATE	Responsibility
Customer query process and content	Process to streamline all customer queries & central record keep from Council ask email, Administrator & CEO office. Standard base template letter updated as required, plus support with responses to specific questions. Update FAQs for trending queries.	Ratepayers, residents and stakeholders	From 29 September 2021	Project Team
Administrator communications via Administrator columns in Coast Connect enews, print advertorial, Council website & Administrator Facebook page. Direct email invite for	Informing about stages of proposal & consultation Promoting Open Office sessions and informing about feedback Promoting online survey open	Ratepayers and key community and sporting groups	Weekly from 29 September 2021	Office of Administrator
Communication to ELT and Unit Managers	Update on program of work and next steps	Unit Managers ELT	1ST week Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, Feb	Project Lead
Internal – CEO Video message, Staff newsletter, CHIP intranet content, key messages for senior managers and face-to-face meetings with staff	Align with ratepayers messaging Address staff concerns re job security, where to find more information	Staff	1ST week Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, Feb	Communications
Community Reference Group x 3 meetings	Terms of Reference. Draft Information materials.	Representative ratepayers	21 October 2021 8 December 2021 24 January 2022	Market Research consultant and Project Team



Communications and Engagement Plan

CHANNEL / ACTIVITY	Notes	Target Audience	LIVE DATE	Responsibility
Business Leaders Roundtable Meeting	Email invite. Follow-up supporting template stakeholder letter after meeting Second letter to inform following Council Meeting to consider applying to IPART.	Business leaders	27 October 2021	Market Research consultant and Project Team
Representative community telephone and reconnect online survey administered by an external research company	Explored awareness of Council's financial difficulties; exploration of usage and satisfaction in services and whether future investment should be more / same / less; and identification of services that could be reduced, if they needed to be.	Ratepayers representative group	November 2021	Market Research consultant and Engagement
Opt-in community online survey administered by an external research company	Content as above	All residents and ratepayers	22 November 2021 to 13 December 2021	Market Research consultation and Engagement
Letters to Stakeholder Groups	Unit Managers direct communication to stakeholders likely impacted on potential service level changes	Targeted stakeholders	28 January 2022	Unit Managers
Consultation report (including communications activities & data)	Published on Your Voice Our Coast Attached to IPART submission	Ratepayers and Community	By 7 February 2022	Communications Project team



Communications and Engagement Plan

Communication Plan Approvals		
Brief received by communications	Date 15 September	Name, Sue Ledingham, Communications, Marketing & Customer Engagement
Communications and Engagement Plan drafted for project team Confirmation of process and dates	Date 5 October 2021	Teresa Walters, Section Manager Communications and Engagement Sharon McLaren, Section Manager Corporate Planning and Reporting
Plan approved by	Date 6 October 2021	Sue Ledingham, Unit Manager Communications & Community Engagement David Miliken, Unit Manager, Strategic Planning Natalia Cowley, Director Corporate Affairs and CFO